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CABOT'S DISCOVERY OF
NORTH AMERICA.

THE DATES CONNECTED WITH THE
VOYAGE OF THE MATTHEW,
OF BRISTOL.

MR. G. E. WEARE'S REPLY TO
MR. HENRY HARRISSE.

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CABOT'S DISCOVERY OF NORTH AMERICA.

MR. HENRY HARRISSE, of Paris, in an article in the June number of the *Forum* (published in New York), has endeavoured to prove that there exists no justification for the Cabot celebration on the 24th ult. in England, Canada, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, &c.

Notes from this article, through the medium of the press, have been circulated throughout the length and the breadth of the United States. My work, in which the *excerptum* (from an ancient MS. Chronicle) containing the date of the landfall occurs, and in which is given a history of the MS. Chronicle, was published after Mr. Harriſſe had written the article for the *Forum*.

A pamphlet, containing a reprint of an article in *Notes and Queries* (8th S. xi. 501),

has been recently published by Mr. HARRISSE, in which he challenges the authenticity of the dates connected with the voyage of the *Matthew*, of Bristol, in the year 1497. Mr. HARRISSE's point is that the ship's name and the dates were forged by Chatterton. In other words, he states that his "impression" is that the MS. Chronicle in which the name and the dates occur was "fabricated, in some form or other, by Chatterton," and that he (Chatterton) sold the chronicle to Sir Francis Fust.

I have published a reply to Mr. HARRISSE in *Notes and Queries* (8th S. xii. 49). The same number of this journal contains a reply to Mr. HARRISSE from Mr. G. R. F. Prowse.

G. E. WEARE.

JOHN CABOT AND THE MATTHEW.

(8th S. xi. 501.)

The *excerptum* referred to by MR. HENRY HARRISSE in which the dates connected with the voyage of the Matthew are set out occurs between entries as to the mayors, sheriffs, &c., of Bristol, as follows:—

"1496. John Drewes [Mayor], Hugh Jobnes [Sheriff], Thomas Vaughan, John Elyott [Bailiffs].

"1497. Henry Dale [Mayor], Richard Vaughan [Sheriff], John Spencer, William Lane [Bailiffs]."

The "complete text" of the *excerptum*, which, subject only to a trifling error as to the sheriff and bailiff, is correctly given by MR. HARRISSE, was published by me last month for the first time.

Please allow me to give a few specimens of the entries in the volume of *excerpta* in the possession of Mr. William George, of Bristol. I propose to dispense with the entries as to the mayors, sheriffs, &c.:—

"1486[7]. This year the Duke of Eedford came into Bristowe, where he continued 3 days and then departed towards Wales."

"1491[2]. This year the 7th of May an Insurrection began in Bristowe between the English Mariners and the Spaniards being soldiers of the ship called the Nicholas of the Tower. And this Insurrection was like to have been the death of many men."

"1507[8]. This year on St. Nicholas Eve was a great wind and flood, which did much hurt in Bristowe, especially in Merchants' cellars and other places."

"1508[9]. This year was an Insurrection in Temple street against the Mayor, through the persuasion of one Robert Henlowe, and the Mayor put many of the Rebels in Prison."

The chronicle contained the curious book-plate of Sir Francis Fust, who died in 1769, but it does not follow that, as suggested by MR. HARRISSE, it was purchased by Sir Francis; it is not at all improbable that it may have come into his possession from his wife's family (the Tookers of Bristol). I will now deal with the extraordinary suggestion of MR. HARRISSE that the chronicle was "fabricated, in some form or other, by Chatterton." Of what value, in the absence of any evidence, is MR. HARRISSE's "impression" that Chatterton sold the MS. book to Sir Francis Fust? Can MR. HARRISSE produce a particle of evidence to prove that Chatterton was ever brought into contact with, or that he was personally known to, Sir Francis Fust, of Hill Court, Gloucestershire? It goes without saying that if the chronicle had been written by Chatterton it would have been regarded as one of the most important productions of his pen. Mr. Kerslake, bookseller, of Bristol, who was a very intelligent and painstaking antiquary, during the time, or a portion of the time, the chronicle remained in his possession, had also in his possession genuine and unquestioned specimens of Chatterton's handwriting; further, the

evidence of living persons could, if necessary, be obtained to prove that, apparently, the chronicle was in a contemporary, *i. e.*, sixteenth century, style of writing. MR. HARRISSE may rest assured that the chronicle, whatever may be its merits or demerits, was not a Chatterton forgery. In the circumstances, I have no alternative but to relegate MR. HARRISSE's "impression" to a place outside the pale of authentic history. The *excerptum* states that the "said ship departed from the port of Bristowe the second day of May, and came home again the 6th of August next following." In a letter written by Lorenzo Pasqualigo, dated 23 Aug., 1497, we find that John Cabot "was three months on the voyage," which is consistent with the dates given in the *excerptum*. The date of the return of the Matthew on "the 6th of August" occurs, so far as I know, in no other place. MR. HARRISSE very fairly points out that

"we know that Cabot was back in England 10 Aug., 1497, but we know it only from the gratuity which Henry VII. granted him on that day, and this was made known in print not before 1831, when N. Harris Nicolas published his 'Excerpta Historica.'"

Here, again, MR. HARRISSE unconsciously affords proof that Chatterton could have had no hand in the formation of the entry in the chronicle; the information as to the vessel having been "three months on the voyage" was only made known within a quite recent period by the discovery of a contemporary letter, and the date of the payment of the gratuity to Cabot was not known in Bristol at the time the chronicle was written. The information as to the gratuity could only have

been obtained in London, and poor Chatterton, whose departure from Bristol for London—he never left Bristol until the year 1770—took place after the death of Sir Francis Fust, was never in a position to pay searchers to examine the original rolls in London. And it is extremely doubtful whether the rolls were accessible in Chatterton's time. With regard to the date given for Cabot's landfall, "St. John the Baptist's day," that is, 24 June, 1497, I see no reason why this date should not be accepted. Judge Prowse, in 'A History of Newfoundland' (p. 9), says:—

"Easterly winds generally prevail in the North Atlantic in early May. Given a fair wind, these little vessels, with their flat floors and broad lug sails, could easily go five to six knots before the wind. Fifty-three days out from Bristol to Newfoundland, and forty-two days home, would not be a record-breaking passage, even for those days."

MR. HARRISSE refers to "the common belief that the text of the above-mentioned *excerptum* is contemporaneous with Cabot's first voyage," but I should imagine that no person who had the slightest knowledge of the history of North America would imagine for a moment that the entry of the word "America" in the *excerptum* was contemporaneous. But although he is correct in saying that Humboldt disclosed, probably for the first time, the particulars of the invention of the name "America" in his 'Examen Critique,' published in 1834, MR. HARRISSE has omitted to call attention to the fact that the name which had been previously the designation of South America, or of a portion of South America, was applied to the whole of the newly found land in Gerard Mercator's

globe made in 1541, the letters "AME" appearing on the northern portion and the letters "ERICA" on the southern. It is not at all improbable that Mercator's ideas were known in Bristol in or before the year 1565. In the course of copying (or in editing, if the word be preferred) a chronicle which purports to contain entries of important events relating to Bristol after the name "America" had become known, the scribe would, properly I think, have made an interpolation in an entry, supposing an entry in another form to have been in existence, for the purpose of elucidation; as to this matter, however, it is obviously clear that the question as to the original form of the entry, or when the entry was first made, must remain pure conjecture in the absence of correct information. Having regard to the fact that a contemporary writer tells us that the voyage occupied three months, I am inclined to think that the criticism of the dates in the chronicle is due to the fact that MR. HARRISSE's conjectural statement (p. 63 of his work on the Cabots) to the effect that the men on board the little vessel, after the landfall, "rested awhile, and devoted some time to refit or repair their diminutive craft, as well as to take in wood and water, and renew the stock of victuals, which could only be done by hunting and salting game on the mainland," although unsupported by proof, is still regarded by him as a record of fact.

The following evidence, which can be read in my work ('Cabot's Discovery of North America'), does not confirm MR. HARRISSE's ideas as to what took place after landing:—

"He [Cabot] saw no human beings, but he has brought here to the king certain snares which had been set to

catch game, and a needle for making nets; he also found some felled trees, by which he judged there were inhabitants, and returned to his ship in alarm. He was three months on his voyage, and on his return saw two islands to starboard, *but would not land*, time being precious, *as he was short of provisions.*"—Pp. 139-40.

"He came at last to mainland, where he planted the royal banner, took possession for His Highness [Henry VII.], made certain marks, and returned."—P. 143.

I am of opinion that the provisioning of the vessel for a three months' voyage, supplemented by a supply of fish, was a matter not very difficult of accomplishment; those who imagine it to be improbable that the vessel would have been sufficiently provisioned for a voyage of three months' duration should not forget that there had been previous voyages from Bristol in quest of the fabled islands which were believed to be in existence beyond the sea-horizon of the western waters, and that so far back as 1480 (twelve years before Columbus sailed on his first expedition) a Bristol vessel had cruised in the Atlantic for *at least nine weeks*, "but in consequence of tempests..... returned to a port in Ireland for the repose of the ship and mariners" ('*Cabot's Discovery of North America*,' pp. 58, 59).

G. E. WEARE.

Weston-super-Mare.

MR. HARRISSE asks, Where did the author of the *Fust* chronicle find the date of Cabot's return, 6 Aug. ? He shows that the Privy Purse entry of 10 Aug. was only known in 1831, and suggests that the MS. was a forgery. If we somewhat alter the question we shall see his argument is fallacious, in part, at least. How could a forger about 1760

have hit upon this date 6 Aug. which synchronizes so accurately with the date of the award, 10 Aug.?

We must remember that until Rawdon Brown discovered Pasqualigo's letter there was absolutely no statement to suggest that the voyage lasted three months; so that, although there would be no difficulty in fixing from Hakluyt on 2 May as a date for the start, the probabilities of a forger choosing 6 Aug. as the date of return, with no data whatever to guide him, are very small indeed. This point may be put a little stronger. Any one reading the accounts of Martyr, Ramusio, &c., which confuse the two voyages, would be led to infer a much later date than August for the arrival home.

The date 6 Aug. seems to be an undesigned coincidence—it may, of course, be nothing more than a coincidence. An authoritative statement as to the value of the *excerpta* as a whole may settle the point, though even then there remains the possibility, though perhaps not the probability, if the chronicle as a whole is a forgery, that this particular entry was transferred from genuine records now lost.

The use of the word America (a use which even in 1565 would have been, I venture to think, an anachronism as describing "the new fonde londe quhar men goeth a fishing"), except upon the supposition of its being a late interpolation, tells strongly against the genuineness of the chronicle. As regards the unreliability of the date given for the landfall, 24 June, MR. HARRISSE has by no means established his point, nor can his attempt be considered sound to limit the sources of information open to a Bristol historian (we must assume Toby to be a Bristolian) in 1565 to Cabot's map at a

time when local tradition must have still been strong in Bristol, and even perhaps some of the original explorers living.

The Cabotian student's interest centres in the corroboration the entry, if true, would give to Pasqualigo's statement that Cabot was "away three months on the voyage which is certain," recently questioned by Col. Church. The sentimental general public will, I fancy, true or untrue, always cling to the picturesque item, found only here and in Barrett, that the first English ship to reach the New World was called the Matthew.

Bradford.

G. R. F. PROWSE.

